## Mr. White to Mr. Gresham.

Legation of the United States,

St. Petersburg, July 6, 1893.

Sir: Your telegram, presumably of May 17, was received on the morning of May 18, and answered at once.

Since telegraphing you I have made additional inquiries with reference to your question, and am persuaded that there has been no new edict banishing Israelites from Poland, as was stated in some of the papers of western Europe; but for some time past the old edicts and regulations against them have been enforced in various parts of the Empire with more and more severity.

Soon after my arrival at this post it was rumored that there was to be some mitigation in the treatment of them, but the hopes based on this rumor have grown less and less, and it is now clear that the tendency is all in the direction not only of excluding Israelites more rigorously than ever from parts of the Empire where they were formerly allowed on sufferance, but to make life more and more difficult for them in those parts of the Empire where they have been allowed to live for many generations.

As you are doubtless aware, there are about 5,000,000 Israelites in Russia, forming, as it is claimed, more than half of the entire Jewish race, and these are packed together in the cities and villages of what was formerly Poland and adjacent governments, in a belt extending along the western borders from northwest to southeast, but which for some years past has been drawn back from the frontier about 40 miles, under the necessity, as it is claimed, imposed by the tendency of the Israelites in that region to conduct smuggling operations. In other [Page 526]parts of the Empire they have only been allowed to reside as a matter of exceptional favor. This alleged favor, under the more kindly reign of Alexander II, was largely developed and matured into a sort of quasi right in the case of certain classes, such as Israelites who have been admitted to the learned professions, or have taken a university degree, or have received the rights of merchants of the first or second guild, paying the heavy fees required in such cases. Certain skilled artisans have also been allowed to reside in certain towns outside the Jewish pale, but their, privileges are very uncertain, liable to revocation at any time, and have in recent years been greatly diminished. Besides this, certain Israelites are allowed by special permits to reside as clerks in sundry establishments, but under the most uncertain tenure. This tenure can be understood by a case which occurred here about a month since.

At that time died an eminent Israelite of St. Petersburg, a Mr. _________, who had distinguished himself by rescuing certain great companies from ruin by his integrity and skill in various large operations, and by the fact that, while he made large and constant gains for those interested in these companies and operations, he laid up for himself only a moderate competence. He had in his employ a large number of Jewish clerks, and it is now regarded here as a matter of fact that at the expiration of their passes, say in a few months, all of them must leave St. Petersburg.

The treatment of the Israelites, whether good or evil, is not based entirely upon any one ukase or statute; there are said to be in the vast jungle of the laws of this Empire more than one thousand decrees and statutes relating to them, besides innumerable circulars, open or secret, regulations, restrictions, extensions, and temporary arrangements, general, special, and local, forming such a tangled growth that probably no human being can say what the law as a whole is—least of all can a Jew in any province have any certain knowledge of his rights.

From time to time, and especially during the reign of Alexander II, who showed himself more kind to them than any other sovereign had ever been, many of them were allowed to leave this overcrowded territory, and, at least, were not hindered from coming into territory and towns which, strictly speaking, they were not considered as entitled to enter; but for some time past this residence on sufferance has been rendered more and more difficult. Details of the treatment to which they have been subjected may be found in the report made by Mr. J. C. Weber and his associate commissioners entitled “Report of the Commissioners of Immigration Upon the Causes Which Incite Immigration to the United States,” Government Printing Office. I must confess that when I first read this report its statements seemed to me exaggerated, or, at least, over-colored, but it is with very great regret that I say that this is no longer my opinion. Not only is great severity exercised as regards the main body of Israelites here, but it is from time to time brought to bear with especial force on those returning to Russia from abroad. The case was recently brought to my notice of a Jewish woman who, having gone abroad, was stopped on her return at a frontier station, and, at last accounts, had been there three days, hoping that some members of her family in Russia might be able to do something to enable her to rejoin them.

Israelites of the humbler classes find it more and more difficult to reenter Russia, and this fact will explain the case of Mrs. Minnie Lerin, referred to in Mr. Wharton's dispatch No. 601 as being refused a visa at [Page 527]the Russian consulate-general in New York, and it will also throw light on various other cases we have had in which the legation has been able to secure mitigation in the application of the rules.

On this latter point we have been successful in obtaining such mitigation in cases of many Israelites who have been subjected to annoyance by overzealous local authorities.

It may appear strange that any nation should wish to expel a people who, in other parts of the world, have amassed so much wealth. The fact is that but a very small fraction of them in Russia are wealthy; few even in comfortable circumstances. The vast majority of them are in poverty, and a very considerable part in misery—just on the border of starvation.

Nearly forty years ago, when, as an attaché of this legation, I was for seven days and nights on the outside of a post coach between St. Petersburg and Warsaw—there being then no railway to the frontier—I had an ample opportunity to see something of these Israelites and of the region in which they live. They exist for the most part in squalor, obliged to resort to almost anything that offers, in order to keep soul and body together. Even the best of them were then treated with contempt by the lowest of the pure Russians. I myself saw two Israelites, evidently of the wealthier class and richly clad, who had ventured into the inclosure in front of the posthouse to look at the coach in which I was, lashed with a coach whip and driven out of the inclosure with blows by one of the postilions—evidently a serf.

A very few millionaire Israelites are to be found among the merchants of the first guild in some of the larger cities, but there is no such proportion of wealthy men among them as in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany. In the smaller towns, in some of which they form the majority of the residents, their poverty is so abject that they drag each other down, making frequently a ruinous competition with each other in such branches of business as they are allowed to pursue. This is now even more the case than ever before, since recent regulations have swept the Israelites living in many rural districts into the towns.

A case was a few days since mentioned to me in which a small town of 8,000 or 10,000 inhabitants had recently received into its population nearly 6,000 Israelites from the surrounding country.

The restrictions are by no means confined to residence; they extend into every field of activity. Even in the parts of the Empire where the Israelites are most free they are not allowed to hold property in land, or to take a mortgage on land, or to farm land, and of late they have even been, to a large extent, prevented from living on farms, and have been thrown back into the cities and villages.

As to other occupations, Jewish manufacturers have at times, even under the present reign, been crippled by laws or regulations forbidding them to employ Christian workmen, but these are understood to be not now in force. They are relics of the old legislation which, in the interest of the servant’s soul, forbade a Jew to employ a Christian servant under pain of death, and which, in a mitigated form, remained on the statute book until 1865, when it was abolished by Alexander II.

There are also many restrictions upon the professions considered more honorable. A few Israelites are allowed to become engineers, and they are allowed to hold 5 per cent of the positions of army surgeons, but no more; and this in spite of the fact that from the middle ages until now their race has been recognized as having a peculiar aptitude for medicine and surgery. As a rule, also, they are debarred from discharging [Page 528]any public functions of importance, and even as to lesser functions a Jew can not be elected mayor of a village or even member of its council.

Not more than one man in ten of those summoned to do jury duty can be a Jew, and even in the cities within the pale, where the Jews form the great majority of the population, they can not hold more than one-third of the places on a municipal council.

Perhaps the most painful of the restrictions upon them is in regard to the education of their children. The world over, as is well known, Israelites will make sacrifices to educate their sons and daughters, such as are not made, save in exceptional cases, by any other people. They are, as is universally recognized, a very gifted race, but no matter how gifted a young Israelite may be, his chances of receiving an education are small.

In regions where they are most numerous, only 10 per cent of the scholars in high schools and universities are allowed to be Jews, but in many cases the number allowed them is but 5 per cent, and in St. Petersburg and Moscow only 3 per cent. Out of seventy-five young Israelites who applied for admission to the University of Dorpat in 1887 only seven were allowed to enter. A few days since the case was brought to my notice of a well-to-do Israelite who wished to educate his son, whom he considered especially gifted, but who could not obtain permission to educate him in St. Petersburg, and was obliged to be satisfied with the permission to enter him at one of the small provincial universities remote from the capital.

To account for this particular restriction it is urged that if freely allowed to receive an advanced education they would swarm in the high schools, universities, and learned professions; and, as a proof of this, the fact is mentioned that some time since, in the absence of restrictions, at Odessa from 50 to 70 per cent of the scholars in sundry Russian colleges were Jews.

As to religious restrictions, the general policy pursued seems to an unprejudiced observer from any other country so illogical as to be incomprehensible. On one hand great powers are given to the Jewish rabbis and religious authorities. They are allowed in the districts where the Israelites mainly live to form a sort of state within the state, with power to impose taxes upon their coreligionists and to give their regulations virtually the force of law. On the other hand, efforts of zealous orthodox Christians to proselyte Israelites, which must provoke much bitterness, are allowed and even favored. The proselytes, once brought within the orthodox Russian fold, no matter by what means, any resumption of the old religion by them is treated as a crime.

Recent cases have occurred where Jews who have been thus converted and who have afterwards attended the synagogue have been brought before the courts.

So, too, in regard to religious instruction it would seem to an unprejudiced observer, wishing well both to Russia and to the Israelites, that the first thing to do would be to substitute instruction in science, general literature, and in technical branches for that which is so strongly complained of by Russians generally—the instruction in the Talmud and Jewish theology. But this is just what is not done, and, indeed, as above stated, not allowed.

The whole system at present in vogue is calculated to make Talmudic and theological schools—which are so constantly complained of as the nurseries and hotbeds of anti-Russian and anti-Christian fanaticism—the only schools accessible to the great majority of gifted young Israelites.

As to recent interferences of which accounts have been published in the English newspapers, and especially as to a statement that a very large number of Jewish children were, early during the present year, taken from their parents in one of the southern governments of Russia and put into monastic schools uuder charge of orthodox priests, this statement having been brought to my notice especially by letters addressed to me as the representative of the United States, I communicated with our consuls in the regions referred to and also obtained information from other trustworthy sources, and the conclusion at which I arrived was that the statement was untrue; it probably had its origin in the fact that much anxiety has recently been shown by certain high officials, and especially ecclesiastics, to promote education in which orthodox religious instruction holds a very important part.

In justification of all these restrictions various claims are made. First of all it is claimed that the Jews lend money to peasants and others at enormous rates of interest. But it is pointed out, in answer to this, that sundry bankers and individuals in parts of Russia where no Jews are permitted have made loans at a much higher rate than Jews have ever ventured to do; while it is allowed that 100 per cent a year has not unfrequently been taken by the Israelites. There seems to be no doubt of the fact that from 300 to 800 per cent, and even more, sometimes, has been taken by Christians.

This statement seems incredible, but it is unimpeachable. In a general way it is supported by the recent report of a Russian official to Mr. Sagonof; and a leading journal of St. Petersburg, published under strict censorship, has recently given cases with names and dates where a rate higher than the highest above named, was paid by Russian peasants to Christian money lenders.

Those inclined to lenity towards the Jews point to the fact that none of them would dare take any such rates of interest as Christians may freely demand; that to do so would raise against the Israelites in their neighborhood storms which they could not resist, and it is argued that, as their desire for gain is restricted in this way, their presence in any part of Russia tends to diminish the rate of interest rather than to increase it. On the other hand, it is claimed that they will not work at agriculture and, indeed, that they will do no sort of manual labor which they can avoid.

As to the first of these charges, the fact is dwelt upon, which has so impressed Mr. McKenzie Wallace and other travelers, that the Jewish agricultural colonies founded by Alexander I, in 1810, and by Nicholas I, in 1840, have not done well.

But in answer it may be stated as a simple matter of history that, having been originally an agricultural people, they have been made what they are by ages of persecutions which have driven them into the occupations to which they are now so generally devoted; that in Russia they have for generations been incapacitated for agricultural work by such restrictions as those above referred to; that even if they are allowed here and there to till the land, they are not allowed, in the parts of the Empire which they most inhabit, to buy it or even to farm it, and that thus the greatest incentive to labor is taken away.

As to other branches of manual labor, simply as a matter of fact, there are very large bodies of Jewish artisans in Poland, numbering in the aggregate about one-half the entire adult male Israelite population. Almost every branch of manual labor is represented among them, and well represented. As stone masons they have an especially high reputation, [Page 530]and it is generally conceded that in sobriety, capacity, and attention to work they fully equal their Christian rivals.

Complaint is also made that they, as far as possible, avoid military service. This is doubtless true, but the reasons for it are evident. For the Jewish soldier there is no chance of promotion, and when he retires after service he is, as a rule, subject to the same restrictions and inflictions as others of his race. In spite of this fact the number of them in the conscription of 1886 was over 40,000.

I find everywhere, in discussing this subject, a complaint that the Israelites, wherever they are allowed to exist, get the better of the Russian peasant. The difficulty is that the life of the Israelite is marked by sobriety, self-denial, and foresight; and, whatever maybe the kindly qualities ascribed to the Russian peasant—and they are many—these qualities are rarely, if ever, mentioned among them.

It is also urged against the Israelites in Russia that they are not patriotic, but in view of the policy pursued regarding them the wonder is that any human being should expect them to be patriotic.

There is also frequent complaint against Jewish fanaticism, and recently collections of extracts from the Talmud have been published here as in western Europe, and even in the United States, to show that Israelites are educated in bitter and undying hate of Christians, and taught not only to despise but to despoil them; and it is insisted that the vast majority of the Israelites in Russia have, by ages of this kind of instruction and by the simple laws of heredity, been made beasts of prey with claws and teeth especially sharp, and that the peasant must be protected from them.

Lately this charge has been strongly reiterated, a book having appeared here in which the original Hebrew of the worst Talmudic passages, with translations of them, are placed in parallel columns. It seems to be forgotten that the Israelites would be more than human if such passages did not occur in their sacred writings. While some of those passages antedate the establishment of Christianity, most of them have been the result of fervor under oppression and of the appeal to the vengeance of Jehovah in times of persecution; and it would be but just to set against them the more kindly passages, especially the broadly and beautifully humane teachings which are so frequent in the same writings.

An eminently practical course would be to consider the development of Judaism in the United States, Great Britain, and other countries, where undeniably those darker features of the Talmud have been more and more blotted out from Jewish teaching, and the unfortunate side of Talmudic influence more and more weakened.

But this charge of Talmudic fanaticism is constantly made, and Russians, to show that there is no hatred of Israelites as such, point to the fact that the Koraites, who are non-Talmudic, have always been treated with especial kindness.

To this the answer would seem to be that the Koraites are free from fanaticism because they have been so long kindly treated, and that this same freedom and kindness which has made them unobjectionable to Russian patriotism would, in time, probably render the great mass of Israelites equally so.

There is no need of argument, either in the light of history or of common sense, to prove that these millions of Israelites in Russia are not to be rendered less fanatical by the treatment to which they are at present subjected.

To prove that the more bitter utterances in the Talmud complained [Page 531]of do not necessarily lead Israelites to bate Christians, and indeed to show that the teachings which the Israelites receive in countries where they have more freedom lead them to a broad philanthropy of the highest type, I have been accustomed, in discussing the subject with Russians, to point to such examples of the truest love for human kind as those shown by Judah Tours in the United States, Sir Moses Montefiore in England, Nathan de Rothschild in Austria, James de Rothschild and Baron Hirsch in France, and multitudes of other cases, citing especially the fact of the extensive charities carried on by Israelites in all countries, and the significant circumstance that the first considerable contribution from the United States to the Russian famine fund came from a Jewish synagogue in California, with the request that in the use of it no discrimination should be made between Jews and Christians. Cases like these would seem to do away effectually with the idea that Jewish teachings necessarily inculcate hostility to people of other religious beliefs.

There is also a charge closely connected with the foregoing which undoubtedly has much to do with the present severe reaction. It is constantly repeated that, in spite of the fact that the late Emperor Alexander II had shown himself more kindly toward the Israelites than had any of his predecessors—relaxing the old rules as to residence, occupation, education, and the like, and was sure, had he lived, to go much farther in the same direction, probably as far as breaking down a mass of the existing barriers, and throwing open vast regions never before accessible to them—the proportion of Israelites implicated in the various movements against him, especially in the Nihilistic movement, and in the final plot which led to his assassination, was far beyond the numerical proportion of their race in Russia to the entire population. This feeling was certainly at the bottom of the cruel persecutions of the Israelites by the peasants just after the death of the late Emperor, and has no less certainly much to do with the prejudices of various personages of high influence as well as of the vast mass of the people which still exist.

The remarkable reaction at present dominant in Russia is undoubtedly in great measure, if not entirely, the result of the assassination of Alexander II; it is a mere truism to say that this event was the most unfortunate in its effects on well-ordered progress that has occurred in this Empire; but, so far as the Israelites are concerned, the facts at the bottom of this charge against them can be accounted for, without imputing anything to the race at large, by the mass of bitterness stored up during ages of oppression, not only in Russia, but elsewhere. The matter complained of must certainly be considered as exceptional, for it can not hide the greater fact that the Jews have always shown themselves especially grateful to such rulers as have mitigated their condition or even shown a kindly regard for them.

I was myself, as minister at Berlin, cognizant of innumerable evidences of gratitude and love shown by the entire Jewish population toward the Crown Prince, afterwards the Emperor Frederick III, who, when Jew-baiting was in fashion, and patronized by many persons in high positions, set himself quietly but firmly against it. And this reminiscence leads me to another in regard to the oft-repeated charge that the Israelite is incapable of patriotism, is a mere beast of prey, and makes common cause with those of his race engaged in sucking out the substance of the nation where he happens to be. It was my good fortune to know personally several Israelites at Berlin, who as members of the Imperial Parliament showed their patriotism by casting [Page 532]away all hopes of political advancement and resisting certain financial claims in which some of their coreligionists, as well as some leading and very influential Christians, were deeply engaged. There is nothing nobler in recent parliamentary history than the career of such Israelites as Lasker and Bamberger during that period, and at this moment no sane man in Germany hesitates to ascribe to the Israelite Simson all the higher qualities required in his great office, that of chief justice in the highest court of the German Empire.

The same broad and humane characteristics have been shown among the vast majority of Israelites eminent in science, philosophy, literature, and the arts. Long before the Israelite Spinoza wrought his own ideal life into the history of philosophy, this was noted, and it has continued to be noted in Russia. During my former residence here there were two eminent representatives of the proscribed race in the highest scientific circles, and they were especially patriotic and broad in their sympathies; and to-day the greatest of Russian sculptors, Antokolski, an Israelite, has thrown into his work not only more genius, but also more of profoundly patriotic Russian feeling, than has any other sculptor of this period. He has revived more evidently than has any other sculptor the devotion of Russians to their greatest men in times past, and whenever the project of erecting at St. Petersburg a worthy monument to the late Emperor shall be carried out, there is no competent judge who will not acknowledge that he is the man in all Russia to embody in marble or bronze the gratitude of the nation. This is no mere personal opinion of my own, for when recently a critic based an article against Antokolski's works, evidently upon grounds of race antipathy, a brilliant young author, of one of the oldest and most thoroughly Russian families in the Empire, Prince Sergius Wolkonsky, wrote a most cogent refutation of the attack. It is also charged that in Russia, and, indeed, throughout Europe, an undue proportion of Jews have been prominent in movements generally known as "socialistic," and such men as Ferdinand Lasalle and Karl Marx are referred to.

When this statement has been made in my hearing I have met it by the counter statement of a fact which seems to me to result from the freedom allowed in the United States, namely, the fact that at the meeting of the American Social Science Association in 1891, in which a discussion took place involving the very basis of the existing social system, and in which the leading representatives of both sides in the United States were most fully represented, the argument which was generally agreed to be the most effective against the revolutionary and antisocial forces was made by a young Israelite, Prof. Seligman, of Columbia University, in the city of New York. Here, again, results are mistaken for causes; the attitude complained of in the Israelites is clearly the result of the oppression of their race.

But there is one charge which it is perhaps my duty to say that I have never heard made against Israelites even by Russians most opposed to them—the charge that they are to be found in undue or even in any considerable proportions among inebriates or criminals. The simplest reason for this exception in their favor is found in the official statistics which show that, in the Governments where they are most numerous, diseases and crimes resulting from the consumption of alcoholic drinks are least numerous, and that where the number of Israelites is greatest the consumption of spirits is least. It is also well known, as a matter of general observation, that the Russian Israelites are, as a rule, sober, and that crimes among them are comparatively infrequent.

Yet, if in any country we might expect alcoholism to be greatly developed among them it would be in this Empire, where their misery is so great and the temptation to drown it in intoxicating beverages so constant; and if in any country we might expect crime to be developed largely among them it would be in this Empire, where, crowded together as they are, the struggle for existence is so bitter. Their survival under it can only be accounted for by their superior thrift and sobriety.

It would be a mistake to suppose that religious hatred or even deeply religious feeling is a main factor in this question. The average Russian believes that all outside the orthodox Greek Church are lost; but he does not hate them on that account, and though there has been of late years, during the present reaction, an increase of pressure upon various Christian organizations outside the established church, this has been undeniably from political rather than religious reasons; it has been part of the "Russifying process," which is at present the temporary fashion.

The rule in Russia has always been toleration, though limited by an arrangement which seems to a stranger very peculiar. In St. Petersburg, for example, there are churches for nearly all the recognized forms of Christian belief, as well as synagogues for Hebrews, and at least one Mohammedan mosque; but the only proselytism allowed is that between themselves and from them to the established church; in other words, the Greek Church may proselyte from any of them, and, within certain limits, each of them may proselyte from its unorthodox neighbors, but none of them can make converts from the Greek Church.

This regulation seems rather the result, on the whole, of organized indifference than of zeal, its main purpose being undoubtedly to keep down any troublesome religious fervor. The great body of the Russian peasantry, when left to themselves, seem to be remarkably free from any spirit of fanatical hostility toward religious systems differing from their own, and even from the desire to make proselytes. Mr. Mackenzie Wallace, in his admirable book, after showing that the orthodox Russian and the Mahommedan Tartar live in various communities in perfect peace with each other, details a conversation with a Russian peasant, in which the latter told him that just as God gave the Tartar a darker skin, so he gave him a different religion; and this feeling of indifference, when the peasants are not excited by zealots on one side or the other, seems to prevail toward the Roman Catholics in Poland and the Protestants in the Baltic provinces and Finland. While some priests have undoubtedly done much to create a more zealous feeling, it was especially noted during the fierce persecutions of the Jews early in the present reign that in several cases the orthodox village priests not only gave shelter to Israelites seeking to escape harm, but exerted themselves to put an end to the persecutions. So, too, during the past few days the papers have contained a statement that a priest very widely known and highly esteemed, to whom miraculous powers are quite generally attributed, Father John, of Cronstadt, has sent some of the charity money, of which he is almoner, to certain Jewish orphanages under the control of Israelites.

The whole present condition of things is rather the outcome of a great complicated mass of causes, involving racial antipathies, remembrances of financial servitude, vague inherited prejudices, with myths and legends like those of the Middle Ages.

But, whatever may be the origin of the feeling toward the Israelites, the practical fact remains that the present policy regarding them is driving them out of the country in great masses. The German papers speak of large numbers as seeking the United States and the Argentine [Page 534]Republic—but especially the former—through the northern ports of that Empire, and, as I write, the Russian papers state that eight steamers loaded with them are just about leaving Libau for America.

It is, of course, said in regard to these emigrants that they have not been ordered out of the country, that they can stay in Russia if they like, and that Russia has simply exercised her right to manage her own internal affairs in her own way; but it is none the less true that the increasing severity in the enforcement of the regulations regarding the Israelites is the main, if not the only, cause of this exodus. In order that this question may be understood in its relations to the present condition of political opinion in the Empire, there is need to make some additional statement.

There has never been a time, probably, when such a feeling of isolation from the rest of the world, and aversion to foreign influence of every sort, have prevailed in Russia as at present; it is shared by the great majority from the highest to the lowest, and it is echoed in the press. Russia has been, during the last ten years, in a great reactionary period, which now seems to be culminating in the attempted “Russification” of the Empire, involving such measures as increasing pressure upon Poland, increasing interference with the Baltic provinces and the German colonies, in the talk of constitutional changes in Finland, in the substitution of Russian for German names of various western towns, in the steadily increasing provisions for strengthening the orthodox Russian Church against all other religious organizations, in the outcry made by various papers in favor of such proposals as that for transferring the university at Dorpat into the Muscovite regions of the interior, for changing the name of St. Petersburg, and for every sort of Russifying process which the most imaginative can devise.

In this present reaction, connected as it is with bitter disappointment over the defeat of Russian aspirations in the Berlin treaty and since, reforms which were formerly universally considered honorable and desirable for Russia are now regarded with aversion; the controlling feeling is for “Russification.”

Peter the Great is now very largely regarded by Russians as having taken a wrong road, and, while monuments are erected to Alexander II, his services as emancipator of the serfs are rarely alluded to, and the day formerly observed in remembrance of the emancipation has ceased to be publicly noticed. This reaction shows itself in general literature, in paintings, in sculpture, in architecture, in everything. Any discussion regarding a change in the present condition of things is met by the reply that strangers do not understand Russian questions, and that these questions are complicated historically, politically, economically, and socially to such a degree that none but those having personal experience can understand them. If the matter is still further pressed and the good effects of a different policy in the United States, Great Britain, and elsewhere are referred to, it is answered that in those countries a totally different state of things exists, and that no arguments can be made from them to Russia. Any continuance of the discussion is generally met by the statement that Russian questions are largely misrepresented by the press of western Europe; that there is a systematic propaganda against Russia in England, Germany, Austria, and Italy; that England does or allows worse things in her Irish evictions and in her opium traffic, and the United States in lynch law proceedings and treatment of the Chinese, than any done or allowed in Russia; that, in short, Russia is competent to take charge of her own internal policy, and that other powers will do well to mind [Page 535]their own business. This feeling is closely akin to that which was shown sometimes in the United States before the civil war toward foreign comments upon our own “peculiar institution,” when representations by such philanthropists as the Duchess of Sutherland, George Thompson, M. P., and others were indignantly repelled.

This condition of opinion and the actions resulting from it are so extreme that it naturally occurs to one who has observed Russian history that a reaction can not be long deferred.

The progress of Russia thus far has been mainly by a series of reactions. These have sometimes come with surprising suddenness. In view of that which took place when the transition was made from the policy of restriction followed by the Emperor Nicholas to the broadly liberal policy adopted by Alexander II, of which, being connected with this legation at that time, I was a witness, a reaction at present seems by no means impossible or even improbable. It is by no means necessary that a change of reign should take place. A transition might be occasioned, as others have been, by the rise of some strong personality bringing to bear upon the dominant opinion the undoubted fact that the present system of repression toward the Israelites is from every point of view a failure, and that it is doing incalculable harm to Russia.

This dispatch ought not, perhaps, to close without an apology for its length; the subject is one of great importance, and it has seemed to me a duty to furnish the Department, in answer to the Secretary’s question, with as full a report regarding the present stage in the evolution of the matter concerned as my opportunities have enabled me to make.

I am, etc.,

Andrew D. White.

https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1894/d509